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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on research that aims to provide evidence of which approach, contrastive analysis (CA) or error analysis (EA), is more adequate in dealing with errors in tense formation and usage made by Greek learners of English. A contrastive analysis of the English and Greek tense systems, providing points of correspondence and divergence between them, is used as a basis for predicting difficulties that Greek learners will experience in mastering English tenses. The data obtained and analyzed for this study came from a diagnostic test designed to elicit a range of target structures administered to secondary school students who had had 4 years of English. The test was based on the predicted points of interference and facilitation and aimed at investigating whether the predictions made were valid. The results obtained reveal that both CA and EA have a vital role to play. A dual approach provides a better guide to language teaching and learning. (JL)

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'CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS' VERSUS 'ERROR ANALYSIS' WITH REFERENCE TO VERB TENSES IN ENGLISH AND GREEK

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'CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS' VERSUS 'ERROR ANALYSIS' WITH REFERENCE TO VERB TENSES IN ENGLISH AND GREEK

0. INTRODUCTION

Evidence for the existence of language features belonging to the mother tongue (i.e., interference phenomena) in errors made by learners of a foreign language has attracted the attention and interest of linguists for many years. Thus, a whole field of interest called 'Contrastive Analysis' (hereafter CA) has grown up and became a major preoccupation of scholars and particularly applied linguists.

The notion of transfer-interference from one language to another, so central to CA, was first elaborated in connection with bilingualism. Scholars who studied interference were U. Weinreich (1953) and H Haugen (1969) while application of the notion of interference or negative transfer to the learning of foreign language in a formal setting owes much to C. Fries (1945) and R. Lado (1957). To use Lado's own words,

> "Individuals tend to tranfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture..."
>
> R. Lado (1957:2)

From this assumption Lado goes on to state rather boldly, that it is possible to predict what will cause difficulty in learning (the predictive or strong version of CA hypothesis). Where the structures of the two languages are the same CA predicts no difficulty in learning; conversly, where structural differences exist, difficulty is anticipated.

The beliefs of Lado and of other scholars who favoured similar approaches to language teaching (J.B. Carroll 1968, R. Hall 1968, M. Buteau 1970, H. Zobl 1982) were of cource, in keeping

with the tenets of the school of Behaviourism and its approaches to language acquisition and language teaching. On this approach, speech is a matter of habit and learning to speak a matter of habit formation. When, then, the structures of the foreign language differ from mother tongue, and the habits to be acquired differ from those already established, the learner will make errors simply because the old habits persist.

In the years that followed, the CA hypothesis has undergone varying degrees of acceptance and considerable criticism of its validity. Relevant to this opposition to CA is the advent of Transformational Generative Grammar, and the mentalistic approach to language teaching as well as disappointment resulting from its application. Language learning problems and facilitation of language learning was less predictable than teachers had expected.

The most serious charge against CA came from R. Wardaugh (1974) who proposed two versions of the CA hypothesis: a strong version and a weak version. The strong version is the one mirrored in the statements of Fries (1945) and Lado (1957) and their associates. The weak version does not require the linguist's predictions of the learning points that will create difficulties to the learner but,

> "...requires of the linguist that he use the linguistic knowledge available to him in order to account for observed difficulties in the second-language learning..."
> R. Wardaugh (1974:181)

Whatever the criticism hurled at CA, it is not a fallacy to believe that the learner's mother tongue (L_1) will somehow be present during the learning process of L_2. Then, we have to take this fact into consideration when we prepare language teaching materials. Knowledge of contrastive data and pedagogical grammar

are highly desirable for the teacher (J.C. Catford 1968, H. Gleason 1968, W. Rivers 1968, W. Twaddell 1968, R. di Pietro 1972, W. Lee 1972).

The theory that was proposed as an alternative to CA and as a possible panacea to language teaching problems was the theory of Error Analysis (hereafter EA) which was developed in the late sixties and especially from the work of S.P. Corder. He observes that the question of learner's errors has not been treated satisfactorily. He proposes as working hypothesis that

> "Some at least of the strategies adopted by the learner of a second language are substantially the same as those by which a first language is acquired."
>
> (1967:22)

Corder distinguishes between errors of performance which are slips of tongue (or pen) and 'systematic errors' which manifest his underlined knowledge of the language to date and which he calls 'transitional competence'.

Some years later J. Richards (1970/1971) establishes a set of errors not due to the interference from L_1, but from what he calls

> "...overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules and false concepts hypothesized."

In the papers that appeared during the years that followed a shift of emphasis towards a more learner-centered view can be seen. The focus in them is on the learner's power of hypotheses formation as he tries to master the L_2 (L. Duskovà 1969, J. Richards 1974, H. Dulay & Burt 1974). Learners' errors are not considered as a nuisance but a part of the learning process. The type of language the learner uses when he wants to communicate messages in L_2 changes gradually since he keeps aiming to bring

it into line with the language of the native speaker. S. Corder calls this language 'transitional dialect'. L. Selinker 'interlanguage' (1972), and Nemser 'approximative system' (1971). The analysis of this output language encompasses information about the learner's progress in mastering the L_2 and EA is a worthwhile goal (A. Etherton 1977, N. Berkoff 1982).

There seems to be a fairly generally held opinion among experienced teachers as well as scholars that each approach (CA and EA) has its essential role to play in accounting for L_2 learning problems. Among those scholars who share this approach are L. Dušková 1969, P. Angelis 1972, T. Slama-Kazacu 1972, R. Filippovic 1972, C. James 1980, W. Kuhlwein 1984.

What follows is based on a study aiming at providing information about the validity and accuracy of either the CA or EA approaches.

1. CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

First a Contrastive Analysis of Greek and English tenses usage was carried out, the purpose being to illustrate the most salient points of similarity and dissimilarity between the tense systems of the two languages. Translation equivalents were considered to establish whether an exact one-to-one formal-semantic[1] correspondence exists between English and Greek structure and usage. This analysis led to predictions about difficulties that the Greek learners may encouter in trying to internalize and use seven English tenses (in some of their uses). The reason for non inclusion of all tenses and usages was on the one hand, the limitations of the study and on the other, the level of the learners I had in mind to examine. Idiomatic tense usage and tenses with low frequency are taught at advanced levels while the students

who were tested were of low-intermediate level four years of English at a secondary school, where they had only three 45-minute non-intensive sessions per week.

The chosen tenses were:

1. The Simple Present (five uses);
2. The Present Progressive (four uses);
3. The Simple Past (three uses);
4 The Past Progressive (two uses);
5. The Fututre with will/shall + infinitive (two uses);
6. The Present Perfect (three uses);
7. The Past Perfect (one use);

For easy reference in the prediction section the different usages were numbered consecutevely (e.g. for the simple present tense: 1.1 first use, 1.2 second use, 1.3 third use and so on). As it was stated the working hypothesis was: where tense usage of L_1 (Greek) and L_2 (English) coincides formally and semantically, in other words where the Greek translation equivalent manifests one-to-one semantic-formal correspondence with English, the effect will facilitate learning (positive transfer=no errors) symbolized by N (no difficulty). Conversely, where the L_1 and L_2 differ, this difference will inhibit learning (negative transfer= errors) symbolized by D (difficulty).

To give an example, the English present tense covers the semantic area of the Greek present tense when it expresses eternal truths:

'η γη γυρίζει γύρω από τον ήλιο'
'the earth goes round the sun' N

In this case, no error will be predicted (N). However, an equivalent form to the English progressive does not exist in Greek.

The semantic field of the English present progressive is covered semantically and formally by the Greek present tense (simple). If the working hypothesis is correct, the Greek learners will substitute the English present progressive for the Greek present tense, or show confusion and mix the uses of the present progressive in English:

> 'We start work at nine o'clock but today we are starting at 8.30' (Temporary arrangement)

will become:

> 'We start work at nine o'clock but today *we start at 8.30'. D

since the Greek equivalent employs a simple present tense for both occurrences of the verb start:

> 'Πιάνουμε δουλειά στις 9 (συνήθως) αλλά σήμερα πιάνουμε στις 8.30'.

2. MATERIALS AND TEST PROCEDURES

The data obtained and analysed for this study came from a diagnostic test designed to elicit a range of target structures. The test was based on the predicted points of interference and facilitation and aimed at investigating whether the predictions made were valid. It consisted of three parts.

The subjects had four years of English at a secondary school in a suburb of Athens Thus, their level was pre-intermediate-intermediate. The tests were administered in three 45-minute sessions within a week in their normal school time-table. The number of students that participated was 65 initially, but it was reduced to 57 after elimination of incomplete returns.

Because it is difficult to control elicitation of structures in oral exercises (B. Taylor 1975:13) they were avoided. A-

part from two MC tests (where all seven tenses were given as options) and in accordance with P. Corder's suggestion that translation had been successful in studies conducted at Edinburgh, it was decided to employ this technique too (a glossary and a list of the main parts of the irregular verbs accompanied the translation passages to minimize influence of word unfamiliarity). However, I am aware of the fact that there exists some controversy in relation to the use of translation in testing interference (m. Ghadessy'1980, N. Berkoff 1982, H. Dulay and all 1982). The first MC test consisted of 22 items, the second of 16, and the translation passage of 23 items. Some uses were tested more than once depending on their natural occurrence in the texts and some only once.

2.1 Count procedures

(a) A blank was counted as error;

(b) Tenses that were rendered by other acceptable structures were considered correct;

(c) Since a generally held opinion among experienced teachers is that their teaching had been successful if two thirds of their students give correct answers, I set as a limit of correctness the figure of seventy percent (38 students out of 57) for the MC test, and sixty percent for the translation tests since translation requires "the coordinated use of several skills" (R. Hartmann 1980:61) the above measure of correctness was thought to be sufficient.

2.2 CA Predictions versus Test Results

A summary of the CA predictions and the test results are presented in Table 1. The MC results are given first followed by the translation ones.

TABLE 1

TEST RESULTS

TENSE	MC VALIDATED	MC REFUTED	TRANS. VALIDATED	TRANS. REFUTED
SIMPLE PRESENT				
Use A	3		3	4
Use B			1	
Use C			1	
Use D	2			
Use E				1
PRESENT PROGRESSIVE				
Use A	1	2		
Use B	1			
Use C	2		3	2
Use D			1	
SIMPLE PAST				
Use A	4	2		1
Use B	4			
Use C		1		
PAST PROGRESSIVE				
Use A	1			
Use B	4			
FUTURE				
Use A	2	2	1	
Use B			3	
PRESENT PERFECT				
Use A	2			
Use B		2		
Use C				1
PAST PERFECT				
Use A		3	1	
TOTAL	26:68%	12:32%	14:61%	9:39%

MC TEST

1. 68% of the CA predictions were confirmed by the results of the MC test.
2. 32% of the CA predictions were invalidated by the results of the MC test.

TRANSLATION

1. 61% of the CA predictions were confirmed by the translation results.
2. 39% of the CA predictions were invalidated by the translation results.

Finally, from a total of 61 predictions in both tests 40 (66%) of them were validated and 21 (34%) were refuted.

2.3 Conclusion

From the above table this conclusion can be drawn: while it is true that L_1 has an influence on the way the learner comes to terms with the L_2 (since two thirds ,66%, of the predictions were justified) it is equally true that the L_1 is not the one and only influence in L_2 learning (since one third of the predictions,34%, were disproved). Had all the learners followed the L_1 rules in all instances they would have avoided making errors. This provides evidence for the view that errors may stem from attempts to operate within the rule system of L_2. Certainly, these findings do not contribute to our understanding of why on some occasions the learner bases his hypotheses on the mother tongue, and on the target language on the other.

3. ERROR ANALYSIS

In this section an Error Analysis of the errors committed by the Greek learners in the MC and Translation tests was conduc-

ted. It is generally agreed that a neat and totally rigid categorization of errors is an unattainable goal (W. Grauberg 1971, V. Wyatt 1973, G. Abbot 1980). All classifications proposed by different scholars, tend to agree that error comparisons have yielded two major categories: interlingual and developmental errors. The following classification which was hoped to have been generally useful was adopted.

1. Interlingual Errors C. James (1972) calls them Interlingual, B. Taylor (1975) Transfer errors. They refer to errors that reflect native language (L_1) structure.

2. Intralingual Errors J. Richards (1971) labels them Intralingual and Developmental, B. Taylor (1975) as Overgeneralization and C. James as Intralingual (1972). These errors occur when L_1 does not have a rule which L_2 has. The learner is aware of the L_2 rule, but has not mastered it completely and so produces an an error.

3. Ambiguous Errors These errors reflect the learners attempt to use the L_2 rules and at the same time the L_1 influence. For example, in rendering the Greek utterance 'Ολη η Ελλάδα πληροφορείται' into English, this erroneous utterance occurred.: *Greece informed (instead of Greece is informed). Greek employs a passive voice form as English. However, when the learner rendered it into English he forgot that the English passive consists of two parts (while the Greek does not) and so he omitted the auxiliary.

4. Errors that defy explanation. Such errors can be ascribed to neither Interlingual nor Intralingual interference. They are errors of the learner who is literally lost. They are errors

that are sprawned by the learner's mental confusion who blindly guesses at an English form as he is unable to formulate any rule at all (M. Dagut and B. Laufer 1982).

Here follow the results of the Error Analysis.

TABLE 2

ERROR CATEGORIES	MC %	TRANS-LATION %	AVER-AGE %
1. Interlingual Errors	28.6	9.4	19
2. Intralingual Errors	31	71.8	51.4
3. Ambiguous Errors	12.6	8.6	10.6
4. Errors that defy classification	27.8	10.2	19

The results showed that the greatest single source of interference in tense usage is the L_2. From the total amount of errors analyzed intralingual errors scored the highest percentage: 51.4% giving evidence in support of the claim that a large number of errors arise from confusion between items and functions in the L_2.

Errors that reveal L_1 interference did not rate high. The low score (19%) indicates that the testees prefer to try other strategies in mastering the English tenses than follow the beaten track of mother tongue usage.

A third group of errors were those that could not be attributed to any source. They came up to the same percentage as the Interlingual errors (19%). It seems that the heavy burden of learning (learners not only have to learn the uses of tenses but also the inflections: M. Buteau 1970) makes the students confuse forms and meanings.

A small group of errors (10.6%) appears to be the product of

influence of both the L_1 and L_2 revealing thus the learner's hesitation about which way to follow.

4. CONCLUSION

Upon close examination of errors made by Greek learners in tense usage it became evident that:

A. Not all errors can be accounted for by negative transfer from L_1 and to this extent the CA hypothesis is insufficient in many instances. Errors that do not reflect the mother tongue cannot be predicted by the CA hypothesis.

B. EA can throw light on the L_2 learning process but cannot explain all causes of errors, which appear to be multidimentional. However, EA would not have been able to recognize part of the errors without a prior CA.

Therefore: each line of thought has its vital role to play in interpreting problems and suggesting approaches to L_2 learning. Adopting exclusively only the one, we would deprive ourselves of the benefits we might gain from the other. A combined CA and EA model will on the one hand compensate for the drawbacks of each taken singly, and on the other, will provide the teacher with insights into learning process.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING THE TENSE SYSTEM OF ENGLISH EFFECTIVELY

To argue that my suggestions for teaching the English tenses are the best or the only ones that would work wonders with Greek learners, is to commit the same fallacy ascribed to all totalistic claims in language learning. However, some general principles that result from this research will be proposed.

Greek learners cannot be expected to discover immediately

the correspondences between English and Greek by simple exposure. If left unaided they might be misled and make wrong assumptions about similarities and differences. On the contrary, the Greek learner would profit considerably from having similarities between English and Greek brought into broader perspective. A learner disposed favourably to a foreign language is a positive start. Thus, a general contrastive analysis, from the teacher, would warn the learner of what awaits him in the beginning and in the long run. It is not suggested that the differences between English and Greek should be emphasized during classroom work or to be made explicit tothe learners. It is simply recommented that awareness of one-to-many, many-to-one, or no correspondences at all between English and Greek would help the teacher cope with errors and pay adequate attention to 'sensitive' areas of English tense formation and usage.

No tenses (different from Greek or not) should be taught in complete isolation, but in relation to other items in the language. They should be integrated with the other material presented in class. Inasmuch as, until some definite results from scientific research emerge, we do not know what might be a logical sequence of presenting the English tenses, it seems therefore wise to rely upon common sence, and grade the structures by taking the 'simple' ones before the more 'complex' ones. To take an example, the learning load for the Greek learner is lighter from the formal and semantic point of view, in mastering the Simple Present Active than the Present Progressive for which there is no correspondence at all in Greek.

Finally, there is good reason to believe that it is good rather than harmful to give extra practice to tenses for which

Greek learners seem to need more reinforcement. An analysis of their errors in tense usage will reveal where the L_1 causes problems for the learner or where confusion within English vexes him.

On the basis of the results of the study and my experience in teaching and correcting errors made by Greek learners in the use and formation of the English tenses, a teaching programme for four years of instruction is proposed in the Appendix. It is hoped that this programme will facilitate the teaching of the English tenses to Greek learners.

How far learners will learn the structures though will depend on many factors such as the practice that will follow the teaching of each paradigm; the kind of facilities that exist in the school (i.e. visual aids, videos and the like); the method used by the teacher; his personality and the rapport between him and the learner; the age; the intelligence of the learner; his attitude; his motivation (the list is not exhaustive).

It appears that in some way or another, we can grade the language we will teach, and handle the way we will present our teaching material. However, what we have not managed to govern up to now is to control the learning process completely. I prefer to end this paper by quoting from S.P. Corder (1973:238).

> "Teaching is concerned with the data and its mode of presentation; we can control and manipulate it in various ways. What neither the learner nor the teacher can do is entirely manipulate or control the learning process. This is part of human psychology."

Evanthia Tsiouris

NOTES

1. This concept was borrowed from V. Ivir (1969)

APPENDIX A

(a) First Year

1. Simple Present of the verb 'to be'.
2. Imperatives (with or without 'please').

   (The above structures are relevant to such functions as introducing yourself, expressing requests, asking about directions etc; thus, they would prompt interaction.)
3. Simple Present (habitual use, equivalent to Greek).

   (Start with the third person singular, since learners find more difficulty in remembering than omitting the -s.)
4. Present Progressive (Stress the progressive aspect, but avoid making the learners aware that there are verbs that violate the rule.)
5. Present Simple vs Progressive
6. Re-teach the Simple Present (for simple descriptions)
7. Past Simple (with regular verbs)
8. Past Simple (with irregular verbs)
9. Past Progressive (to describe uniterrupted actions in the past - with 'all day' etc.)
10. Past Simple contrasted with Past Progressive (an action completed quickly contrasted with an action in progress)
11. Past of modals
12. Will/shall Future (for predictions, colourless future equivalent to the Greek Momentary Future)
13. Simple Present (for instructions, similar to Greek)
14. Past Simple (when reference is made to dead people, so that the next step will be to introduce the Present Perfect: He wrote five plays vs He has written five plays)

15. Present Perfect (with regular and irregular verbs)
16. Present Perfect vs Past Simple

It is taken as axiomatic that every time a new aspect of a tense is introduced, the one already exemplified is revised again. Revisions at different points of the course are left to the descretion of the instructor.

(b) Second Year

1. Present Simple (for eternal truths, as in Greek)
2. Present Progressive (It is time the learner's attention is drawn to verbs that do not have a progressive form)
3. Present Perfect (with 'since' and 'for')
4. Past Perfect (for an action completed before some past moment or point in the past)
5. Simple Present Passive (learners are already familiar with past participles)
6. Simple Perfect Progressive (to emphasize the idea of activity in progress until now)
7. Present Perfect Simple vs Progressive
8. Present Simple (with temporal conjunctions, CA and EA revealed L_1 negative transfer)
9. Simple Past (for past habits)
10. Past Progressive (for parallel actions in progress)
11. Future 'be going + to + infinitive'
12. Present Perfect (with just, EA showed strong L_1 negative transfer)
13. Introduce direct Speech (devote more than one session)

(c) Third Year

1. Present Progressive (with verbs that do not normally have

it, but which take a progressive form when they express a different nuance)

2. Simple Past (for an action that occupied a time now terminated)
3. Past Progressive (an action in progress round a time point)
4. Conditionals (A consecutive presentation is suggested)
5. Present Perfect (all adverbials associated with it)
6. Simple Past Passive
7. Present Progressive (for definite arrangements)
8. Present Progressive Passive
9. Simple Present (in exclamatory sentences introduced by here and there)
10. Simple Past (to add politeness)
11. Past Progressive (with always)
12. Simple Present (to express futurity)
13. Present Perfect (with 'ever' and 'never')

(d) Fourth Year

1. Present Perfect (Resultive Past)
2. Present Perfect Simple Passive
3. Present Simple (in newspaper headlines, in narrative)
4. Past Tense (for hypothetical meaning)
5. Past Progressive (literary use)
6. Future will/shall + progressive
7. Future Perfect (for an action that will be completed by a certain point in future time).

A general revision of all tenses (all uses grouped together for each tense separatelly) is suggested for the next year.

More sophisticated grammar points should be considered in reading comprehension passages and other authentic material during the final stages of the course.

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